



Bloor Street United Church Response to Request for Additional Information

The congregation of Bloor Street United Church is pleased to offer the following supplementary information to our proposal to the General Council Executive for accommodating the General Council Offices (the “GCO”):

1. In what way would the proposed site/location provide visibility to The United Church of Canada (the “UCC”)?

Bloor Street United Church is embarking upon an exceptional redevelopment project that will combine the powerful presence of a traditional United Church sanctuary, an active faith community, and new community and office facilities built to LEED standards. The GCO would be prominently placed within this landmark development in the heart of Toronto.

Bloor Street United is named after Toronto’s main east-west corridor, and is located between St George Street and Spadina Avenue. The neighbourhood is very active with much pedestrian, vehicular and transit traffic. The wide street, broad boulevards, and sitting at the intersection of the two subway lines and one surface transit line, gives the site both high visibility and easy access.

We expect that there will be strategic signage identifying Bloor Street as a United Church. Additional signage will identify the GCO, which will have its own distinct space within the development; hence the UCC will have a significant physical and visual presence on one of Toronto’s busiest thoroughfares.

The redevelopment of a long standing United Church in the heart of Toronto, combining our congregation and our national office, will convey a powerful message locally, nationally, and beyond about the continued relevance and vibrancy of the UCC.

2. Is there any way in which the proposed site/location might connect the GCO with other missions and ministries of the UCC; ecumenical/inter-faith partners; or those “marginalized” by society?

Bloor Street United is located at the heart one of the most diverse cities in the world. Our immediate neighbourhood is one of contrasts – where wealth and abundance live side-by-side with need and despair. Numerous social



service agencies, such as the Toronto Native Centre, Sistering, and faith communities such as Bloor Street United, strive to bridge this gap.

Toronto is also the location of the head offices of a number of the UCC's ecumenical and interfaith partners, including the Canadian Council of Churches, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Salvation Army in Canada, the Anglican United Refugee Alliance and KAIROS. Within easy walking distance are Emanuel College, the Toronto School of Theology, and the University's Multi-Faith Centre.

In choosing the Bloor Street United location, the GCO partners with a congregation with a long history of social justice in both local and global contexts. Community programs, both congregationally and community based (operating within Bloor Street United), give concrete context and experience of God's mission in the world on our doorstep. Additionally, the congregation has the resources to provide on-the-ground feedback or serve as a pilot for GCO initiatives, as we seek to fulfill God's mission together.

3. In what way would the proposed site/location be "welcoming" for guests and members of the UCC?

Guests, members, and volunteers visiting the GCO will appreciate the sense of familiarity in approaching an office that looks like 'church,' yet will be surprised at the freshness, energy, and vitality of the new structure. Bloor Street United sits on a bustling street of affordable restaurants, landmarks, and cultural venues. Walking east or west one finds the Royal Ontario Museum, the Royal Conservatory of Music, the University of Toronto campus, hotels, theatres, Varsity Stadium, the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre, and the Trinity-St. Paul's Centre for Faith, Justice, and the Arts. Yet immediately north or south one can walk on quiet tree-lined residential streets.

Bloor Street United's efforts to be a welcoming community of faith has meant that membership is growing and diversifying. As a result, there is a continued good feeling and freshness to our worship. In addition, our intentions to build green, accessible and flexible space all contribute to the possibility of greater hospitality. Sharing this livable site with a vibrant congregation will infuse the GCO with a sense of connection and welcome that often does not exist in most commercial spaces. As well, being placed at the core of a dynamic and diverse city will enhance the experience and level of comfort of international guests.



4. In what way would the proposed site/location enhance the commitment of the UCC to becoming an inter-cultural church?

The GCO would be located in what is generally acknowledged to be one of the most diverse cities in the world: culturally, linguistically, ethnically, gastronomically, and religiously. All the major religions of the world can be found in the Greater Toronto Area, often in significant numbers.

Many Christian denominations worship in our immediate neighbourhood; Bloor Street United has, over the years cultivated relationships with many of them as well as with nearby Buddhist, Muslim and Jewish congregations. This existing network can help facilitate the GCO's integration into a diverse community on its doorstep.

Bloor Street United also employs a refugee coordinator who works with new immigrants, especially those unfamiliar with Canadian or western ways to help them adapt to Canadian society. In addition, the congregation has established a no-interest loan fund which assists refugees of all faiths with funding when other sources of funding are not available to them. The diversity of the immediate community, the changes within the congregation, and the visitors to the programs to the church, will contribute to the inter-cultural learning and development of God's mission through the GCO and the pastoral charge.

5. Can you name a particular theological, pastoral, or missiological characteristic that is particular to the proposed site/location which would contribute to the identity of the UCC?

The GCO is sometimes accused of being distant, out-of-touch, and unappreciative of the realities of the pastoral charge. By forging a partnership with a congregation, it demonstrates its commitment to deepening its understanding of those realities by 'walking the walk' with a pastoral charge. In choosing such a site, rather than one within a commercial or academic setting, the GCO is strengthening the ties across all the Courts of the Church, living out the church's commitment to faithful communities serving God together.

Renewal of mission is at the core of redevelopment at Bloor Street United. The future space of the congregation and the GCO must be accessible, flexible, hospitable, and must leave as small an environmental footprint as possible. For these two Courts of the Church, this opportunity for renewal



could be achieved together through the redevelopment of the Bloor Street United site. We need to break open our walls, both literally and figuratively, and welcome people into our spaces to see and taste the abundance of God's love, the life of God's mission for the world, and the journey of the UCC – from the perspectives of both the General Council and a pastoral charge – in that mission.

6. Can you name a particular characteristic that contributes to the proposed site/location being identified as sacred space?

Since the GCO will be part of the redevelopment of Bloor Street United's present site it will clearly be associated with an existing vital and active worshipping community. Sacred space will be evoked not only through the architecture, but also in the interaction between space, people, and community worshipping and working together across Courts of the Church.

One of the advantages of this proposal is that the GCO will have access to the meeting space within in the church during the weekdays. Moderator Mardi Tindal's theme of *Caring for Soul, Community, and Creation*, calls us to exercise careful stewardship and to collaborate whenever possible, so that we can tread lightly on the earth. Sharing facilities with the congregation can reduce the amount of space required by the GCO to about 40,000 sq feet, a saving of some 6,000 sq feet. The use of the 300 seat sanctuary, large meeting rooms and kitchens – all within the congregational space yet useable by GCO, will foster a sense of 'being at church and at home,' in a way that purpose-built corporate offices cannot imitate.